

If fast-food places disappeared, some U.S. kids would still be obese

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.24.14

Word Count **500**



Daijah Mack, 2, of Detroit, Mich., enjoys a side of barbecue sauce with McDonald's french fries. Experts say half of advertising aimed at kids is for food, and 4 of 5 of those ads are for sugary cereal, soft drinks, fast food or salty snacks. Photo: Susan Tusa/Detroit Free Press

Imagine for a moment that all of the nation's fast-food restaurants vanished overnight. All the drive-thru windows, the dollar deals and the odor of french fries — gone! Would there be far fewer overweight kids?

The answer is very likely no. At least that is what a study published this week says. Children who frequently eat at fast-food restaurants will go home and still eat unhealthy foods. They'll gobble cookies and chips. They will chug sugar-sweetened soda from a bottle. They'll heat up frozen pizzas.

Researchers from the University of North Carolina studied the issue. They were led by nutrition professor Barry Popkin.

The researchers found that children who go to fast-food restaurants tend to eat food that would probably make many of them overweight or [obese \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity) anyway. They do this even when they are not eating at the restaurants. The researchers used a national database of

Americans' health and eating behaviors. They looked at information for 4,466 American kids. They split the kids up according to what they ate when they were not eating fast food. The kids were ages 2 to 18.

Counting Calories

Some participants were said to eat a "Western diet." The non-fast food they ate was relatively high in saturated fats and added sugars. Others were said to follow a "prudent diet." They ate more fruits and vegetables, leaner proteins and less added sugar and saturated fat.

The researchers then went back to the children's detailed eating records. They divided the children into three groups. The first group was called were non-fast food eaters. Others were in a group of "low" eaters of fast food. Their food tracking records showed that no more than 30 percent of their calories came from fast-food restaurants. The last group was called "high" eaters of fast food because more than 30 percent of their calories came from a fast-food restaurant.

The result: Those who followed the Western diet when they were not eating at fast-food restaurants had the highest rates of being overweight or obese. This was true even for those who were in the group of non-eaters of fast food. Those who followed a "prudent diet" when not eating fast food were much less likely to be overweight or obese. This was the case even for those who were in the "high" group of fast food eaters.

The group of "low" eaters of fast food were 1.5 times as likely to follow a Western diet than people who didn't eat fast food. The group of "high" fast food eaters were 2.2 times as likely to do so.

"The location where foods are obtained may not be as important as the nutritional quality of the foods" eaten, the authors wrote in Thursday's study.

Targeting fast-food restaurants to cut down on unhealthy weight gain may not create the results we think. Those efforts may be necessary. But they are not enough to cut down on unhealthy weight gain by children if the rest of the diet is not dealt with.

Quiz

- 1 Select the sentence from the article that DOES NOT support the conclusion drawn from the research?
 - (A) Their food tracking records showed that no more than 30 percent of their calories came from fast-food restaurants.
 - (B) Those who followed a "prudent diet" when not dining on fast food were significantly less likely to be overweight or obese.
 - (C) The group of "low" eaters of fast food were 1.5 times as likely to follow a Western diet than people who didn't eat fast food.
 - (D) "The location where foods are obtained may not be as important as the nutritional quality of the foods eaten," the authors wrote in Thursday's study.

- 2 Read the sentence from the article: Others were said to follow a "prudent diet." Which of the following statements about those who follow a prudent diet is CORRECT?
 - (A) They are comparatively at low risk of becoming obese.
 - (B) They eat the less food that those who follow a western diet.
 - (C) They do not like visiting fast food restaurants.
 - (D) They like eating vegetables more than fast food.

- 3 Select the sentence from the article that BEST supports its main idea.
 - (A) Imagine for a moment that all of the nation's fast-food restaurants vanished overnight.
 - (B) They do this even when they are not eating at the restaurants.
 - (C) The non-fast food they ate was relatively high in saturated fats and added sugars.
 - (D) Their food tracking records showed that no more than 30 percent of their calories came from fast-food restaurants.

- 4 Read the first four paragraphs from the section "Counting Calories." Select the paragraphs that BEST describe the outcome of the research conducted.
 - (A) Paragraphs 1 and 2
 - (B) Paragraphs 1 and 4
 - (C) Paragraphs 3 and 4
 - (D) Paragraphs 2 and 3

Answer Key

- 1 Select the sentence from the article that DOES NOT support the conclusion drawn from the research?
- (A) **Their food tracking records showed that no more than 30 percent of their calories came from fast-food restaurants.**
- (B) Those who followed a "prudent diet" when not dining on fast food were significantly less likely to be overweight or obese.
- (C) The group of "low" eaters of fast food were 1.5 times as likely to follow a Western diet than people who didn't eat fast food.
- (D) "The location where foods are obtained may not be as important as the nutritional quality of the foods eaten," the authors wrote in Thursday's study.
- 2 Read the sentence from the article: Others were said to follow a "prudent diet." Which of the following statements about those who follow a prudent diet is CORRECT?
- (A) **They are comparatively at low risk of becoming obese.**
- (B) They eat the less food that those who follow a western diet.
- (C) They do not like visiting fast food restaurants.
- (D) They like eating vegetables more than fast food.
- 3 Select the sentence from the article that BEST supports its main idea.
- (A) Imagine for a moment that all of the nation's fast-food restaurants vanished overnight.
- (B) **They do this even when they are not eating at the restaurants.**
- (C) The non-fast food they ate was relatively high in saturated fats and added sugars.
- (D) Their food tracking records showed that no more than 30 percent of their calories came from fast-food restaurants.
- 4 Read the first four paragraphs from the section "Counting Calories." Select the paragraphs that BEST describe the outcome of the research conducted.
- (A) Paragraphs 1 and 2
- (B) Paragraphs 1 and 4
- (C) **Paragraphs 3 and 4**
- (D) Paragraphs 2 and 3